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Bosanquet, Bernard
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idea of decadence

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University College of North Wales,
Bangor.

Some Reflections on the Idea of Decadence.

BY
BERNARD BOSANQUET, Esq., M.A.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

Closing Ceremony of the Session 1900-1.

JUNE 21st, 1901.



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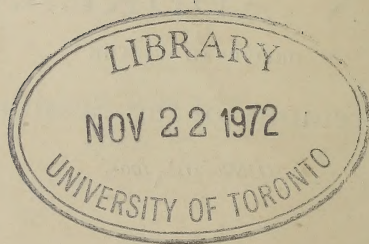
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SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE IDEA OF DECADENCE.

IN choosing a colourless title for my address, it was my purpose to avoid misunderstanding. If I had announced as my subject "The Praises of Decadence," apart from the explanations which I hope to furnish to-day, I might have incurred the old imputation of being a corrupter of youth. And I shrank from the honour of sharing this imputation with my betters, whether of ancient or of modern times. None the less, it is my desire to call attention to the debt which we are under to periods of art and letters and ideas, other than the great classical epochs ; which latter form, after all, but brief interruptions in the routine of human affairs. Some consideration of this matter seems at once to be forced upon us if we adopt in any degree what I take to be the modern standpoint with regard to continuity in history. For if it were true that for long ages together the human mind is either manifestly in decay or retrogression, or, at all events, is living on its capital, and ceasing to be intellectually and artistically productive, how could such a state of things enable us to account for the occasional renaissance of brilliant achievement ? I do not suggest that this paradox is at all final or decisive against the reality of decay and degeneration in mankind, as we certainly observe them in particular forms of art, letters and philosophy. Of course, we may suppose that new combinations, racial perhaps, or economic, may disengage latent energies, and that thus, practically, a new thing may be created and new life arise after what was really a decay and not merely a transformation of the old. History is much too complex, I take it, to allow of our pronouncing definitely that the conditions of a totally new civilisation might not come together at some time and place, practically without inheritance from anything that had gone before.

I only suggest that the conception of continuity in human life makes a *prima facie* case for anticipating that we shall find some element of positive gain in periods which we have been wont to set down as abandoned to gloom and retrogression. Shakespeare's great saying, "Love speaks with better knowledge, and knowledge with dearer love," will probably justify itself here, as it seldom fails to do. And the course of modern study is showing us, I think, that what we called the decadence was determined in some measure by the point where our college curriculum broke off, and that the darkness of the Dark Ages, for example, was in us at least as much as in them. Not that I would hint a denial of the contrast between classical and decadent periods, taken in a certain sense which we are partly to illustrate to-day. But the interesting and very important question is, how far in such ages new life is stirring in the decay of the old ; how far in fact this decay is itself a symptom or appearance in a new positive development to which the old growth itself or its conditions furnished indispensable factors.

I will put the point afresh by the help of a solution which is likely to be offered as obvious. It might be said to me with some appearance of reason : "You are making a paradox by confusing together facts which are simple but different. Undoubtedly there is real decay in human life ; but life is complex, and its different growths or branches are not all decaying at the same time. One thing, say literature, or the drama, may be in decay, while another thing, say politics, or morality, may be gaining new vigour. Philosophy and learning may languish while a new religion is conquering the world. Or the exact sciences and free intellectual speculation may progress by leaps and bounds, while painting and architecture and the drama are dwindling to the shadow of a shade. Then, if you choose to apply such a name as decadence to a whole many-sided epoch of human affairs, you can doubtless appear to prove that elements of growth and of decay are paradoxically intermingled and connected. But the fact is quite simple. One thing is growing and at the same time another thing is dying. But that which is growing is not dying,

and that which is dying is not growing. Your paradox, the suggestion that a decadence, as such, may be fertile, is a mere equivocation."

In this objection, no doubt, there would be a certain truth. New emotions and ideas may arise independently of the old. We cannot wholly account for their kindling, and they may find new fuel, so to speak, among classes, populations, and types of mind, which socially or geographically have hitherto been outside the focus of history. Or, in a still more perplexing fashion, the attention of civilised society may be divided; and an effete literary tradition may continue to pre-occupy the cultivated world, while changes and ideas of the deepest import are pressing upon the very society in which that world is included. I am thinking primarily of Mr. Dill's portrayal of the scholar and gentleman during the last centuries of the Western Empire; but I suppose you might have seen the same thing nearer home in our ancient Universities not a hundred years ago.

I will not argue the matter further in the abstract. I will try to put before you, in the scanty and fragmentary form which my knowledge and the opportunity permit, some illustrations of the fertility of a decadence. I will try in doing so to indicate how, very frequently, it is the actual break-up of great classical traditions—the simplification, application to life, experimentation, exploration, which naturally go on when the first impression and dominating excitement of the great classical creativeness has passed away—it is, if you like, the reflectiveness of the day after the intoxication, from which strange and new developments, of the greatest importance for humanity, have often sprung. Often, perhaps, it is thus that the material and instruments are prepared, as it were underground, for a new period of classical creation. I will venture to brush aside the formal difficulty that what we learn to treat as great works and ideas we shall no longer set down as decadent. I shall assume in particular that there is justification of some kind for the common feeling which has found a general "decadence"—social, political, and æsthetic—in and after Euripides and throughout the Athenian

fourth century and the Hellenistic period ; after, and to some extent in, the later Roman and Byzantine Empire ; and a decadence, more perplexing, because at first sight more exclusively æsthetic, in the age succeeding the classics of the Italian Renaissance or of the Elizabethan drama in England ; a decadence obviously extending, in some respects, to our own day.

It is no doubt a very noticeable fact that a change is coming over the judgment of critics upon the art of Euripides, and that of critics and historians upon the Athens of Demosthenes, upon the later Greek literature and philosophy, and upon the Middle Age and the Byzantine Empire. The continuity of thought and of history has during the last fifty years been splendidly asserting itself, and I suppose that the ironical spirit of Gibbon and the caricature of Walter Scott—I speak of the description of the Byzantine court in “Count Robert of Paris”—are now decidedly out of date. Still the difference which has always been felt is there ; and we feel that something real is meant, for example, by giving the name of decadence (as Mr. Courthope does) to the change which began with Euripides, and, dare I add in a somewhat similar sense, with Praxiteles, and, it may be, with Plato.

It is obvious that with Euripides a modern spirit breaks into the ancient world ; and the fact that the great classical tragic drama comes to an end in him is, we are sure, nothing more than natural. I shall not attempt to characterise his genius in passing, and in the middle of a mere enumeration of suggestive points, which is all that I am aiming at to-day. Those who wish to read about him should go to Professor Gilbert Murray’s history of Greek Literature.

But now let us follow up the further beginnings of this modernism in the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman decadence.

In the first place, then, we may note the revival of the Greek epigram, which has a fairly continuous history of sixteen centuries, from the seventh century before Christ, to the tenth century after—a golden bridge from the ancient world to the new. But one great gap which occurs in its productiveness almost precisely coincides with the ascendancy of imperial Athens and that extraordinary

prime of art and politics which we call the classical period. This is a symptom, and not at all an isolated one, of a certain crushing and overwhelming influence exercised by the imperious excitement of that tremendous age. Before the defeat of the Persians the epigram—a gem of poetry, but not, like the Latin epigram in Martial, all sacrificed to a point—the epigram had attained something like perfection, and with the accession of Alexander it started again with new life. Thus we may fairly say that the decadence, the relaxation of spiritual tension in the post-classical age, not merely coincided with, but actually produced or permitted, the revival of the epigram. Here is a jewel from the decadence, a poem by the librarian of the Alexandrian Library in the third century before Christ—this is a mark of decadence in itself; you do not hear of libraries and librarians in classical Greece. Suppose yourself to have lost by death a friend who was also a fellow-student and a poet, and you might wish you could have written of him like this :

They told me, Heracleitus, they told me you were dead,
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed,
I wept, as I remembered, how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking, and sent him down the sky.
And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,
A handful of grey ashes, long, long ago at rest,
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake,
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.

This revival of the epigram after the Periclean age suggests many things to us. The poetry of love, the poetry of the home and the family, like the epigram, had lacked attention in the classical age. Before that age, in Sappho the love-poetess, the former had a marvellous first prime. Now in the Alexandrian period it rises again, and also the poetry of the home, with wonderful charm and freshness, and we feel that the romantic spirit is beginning the long romance of its history. Here is an epigram of the first century B.C. :

Ah suffering soul, now thou burnest in the fire, and now thou revivest, and fetchest breath again; why weepest thou? When thou didst feed pitiless love in thy bosom, knewest thou not that he was being fed for thy woe? Knewest thou not? Know now his repayment, a fair foster hire.

Take it, fire and cold snow together. Thou wouldst have it so ; bear the pain ; thou sufferest the wages of thy work, scorched with his burning honey.

You will find greater things in Aeschylus or Sophocles, but you will find nothing like this.

Closely bound up, as always, with the romantic spirit is the passion for the beauties of Nature. If you were asked where this fateful expression, "the beauties of Nature," so hackneyed to us, so alien from classical Greece, first occurs in literature, I do not know whether it would occur to you to suggest that we owe it to the Greek decadence. "In the house is rest, in the country the charm of nature," the first time the words occur in this precise meaning, is a sentence from an epigram of the third century B.C., the age of Theocritus. And I may mention here that this feeling for the beauty of the external world evidently tended to grow and prosper during the decadence : and it is in the very depths of what we commonly regard as the decay of Paganism, in the third century A.D. that the last of the great Greek thinkers states distinctly for the first time, the modern idea—the idea of Ruskin and Wordsworth—of the beauty of material things. The return to nature, the falling back upon human and simple sources of enjoyment, in reaction against the over-refinement of culture and luxury, and the crowding and smoke and clamour of huge cities, is one of the happiest features which the world has always owed to a decadence. It begins in the Alexandrian period, and we find it beginning once more in the time of our own Thompson and Cowper, in short, in the age of Rousseau.

Well, we mentioned Theocritus in connection with the third century B.C. ; it is a name which at once symbolises for us the connection of the return to nature with the romantic spirit. But here we have something more than epigrams and theories ; we have nothing less than the beginning of pastoral poetry. We have, indeed, in the lament over Daphnis, the actual type to which in our English literature alone we owe the Lycidas, the Adonais, and the Thyrsis.

One thing more in the present connection. Most of us have

heard, through Mrs. Browning's poem, if nowhere else, the name of Heliodorus :

And we both praised Heliodorus
For his secret of pure lies,
Who forged first his linked stories
In the heat of ladies' eyes.

Heliodorus was a Christian bishop in the fourth century A.D., and he wrote, it would appear, the first, or nearly the first, considerable prose love-romance. His heroine was "Clorinda." Perhaps it would be held that the modern novel of society and the family had a separate origin of its own in Richardson's love letters (again, I should say, like the return to nature, in a decadence); but anyhow the love romance, as a form of literature, unquestionably dates from the decay of letters under the Roman Empire.

Perhaps we have said enough of this wonderful many-coloured growth of literature which sprang up after the centralised art of Athens had died away. It is poor work talking about poetry instead of reading it. Let me urge those who care for literature, but have not yet come in contact with the later Greek writers, to familiarise themselves at least with Theocritus and the epigrams. There is Mr. Lang's translation of the former, and Mr. Mackail's selection, accompanied by a translation, of the latter. The introductions to these works have furnished me with most of the learning which I have just been displaying to you.

Now let us turn to something else.

When you call a man a Stoic or a Cynic or an Epicure—we do not often call a man an Epicurean, though Shakespeare speaks of a "damned Epicurean rascal,"—we bear witness to the influence which the great philosophical creeds of antiquity still exercise on our thought and feeling. So it is when we speak of doing our "duty," or of following our own "nature." Now these great creeds, the language of which is so persistent in our mouths to-day, were not the central or classical philosophies of Greece. They, or the tendencies which they indicate, existed no doubt before and during the time of Socrates and Plato and Aristotle; but they were repressed and

disguised by the force of the central Athenian movement. Being rooted, however, in human nature, they revived in the time of breaking up and reflection, when a man had to look about for himself and find some hold and impulse in his own mind which would help him to live his life. At their best and in their essence these great forms of belief were not so far removed from each other. The Stoic and the Cynic have left a fair impress of themselves upon popular language; the Epicure has not been so fortunate, unless we restore the meaning of his name by insisting on the ideas which it might be held to imply, of a certain daintiness and selection at the banquet of life, a pursuit of satisfaction, not by greediness, but by restraint, intelligence and choice. The common basis of these creeds is in the conviction that with courage, sense, and resignation, to which at their best they add devotion to duty, life, even in a gloomy period, may be made very fairly liveable. It is a lesson permeated to the core with decadence, but nevertheless a most precious lesson for the world. It is symbolised to us all I suppose by the great name of Marcus Aurelius, with the saying which we know through Matthew Arnold, "Even in a palace, life may be led well."

Duty is a good part of our current morality. Who wrote the treatise upon duties the name of which is known to every school-boy? Not Plato or Aristotle; they had ideas which were higher, perhaps, and fuller, but certainly less sharp in outline to the popular mind, less fitted for the burden of the signal flags at Trafalgar. It was Cicero, certainly a decadent in philosophy, but a man touched with humanity in the modern sense, and with the instinct of a statesman and a Roman for the practical and effectual point—it was Cicero, following the Stoics, who wrote the *De Officiis*, the treatise on our duties which is almost a household word.

We have spoken of *humanity*. The sense of humanity and urbanity grew up, it would seem, with the growth of polite experience, and the habit of intercourse in a large and fairly peaceful civilisation. It is mere ignorance of course to deny that the Greek Ethics of the great classical philosophy were founded on the idea

of humanity ; but it was then an idea hidden away in technical definitions and not really operative in daily feeling. It was the later comedy, Terence or his Greek model, to which we owe the saying, "I am human, and I count all that is human my own."

As with duty and humanity, so with nature and freedom. If you want these ideas in the context of a great philosophy, criticised, limited, and entangled in reservations, you would go for them to Plato and Aristotle. But if you want them as the ferment of popular imagination, as the banner of a school, or in definite continuity with the gospel of natural right, you must go for them to the later Greek comedy, to the Stoic and to Cicero, and to the later Roman jurisprudence with its echoes in the middle age. It is the comic poet of the closing fourth century, after the death of Aristotle, who so far as I know first definitely says, in a line which he who runs may read, "no one ever was by nature born a slave." Like other human instincts which we have referred to, this conviction existed during the classical time, but did not gain a hearing in all its simplicity.

I have used more than once this word "simplicity" to indicate a characteristic of the decadence. "Simplification," "simplify yourself," is a literal rendering of one of the precepts of Marcus Aurelius. We commonly think of a decadence as characterised rather by elaboration than by simplicity; and in fact the two are found side by side; there is even such a thing as an elaboration of simplicity; you may find it in Rousseau, perhaps in Marcus Aurelius himself. But I mentioned the term for the interest which it has, as at once the utterance of Marcus Aurelius, and the catch-word, in a much more external sense no doubt, of Tourgenieff's reformers in "A Virgin Soil," or of Kropotkin's Nihilists. It suggests one of the points at which you can verify most readily the connection, as opposed to a mere coincidence, of the elements of life and death in a decadence. In this yearning to revert to the elements, or the inner things of life, and liberate yourself from its accessories, there is undoubtedly something of impotence. There is a letting go of much that has been gained; a confession of inability to deal with the intellectual and ethical inheritance of the

world; with "the white man's burden." It is on the one side, the spirit of a dying age,

"For this losing is true dying,
This is lordly man's downlying;
This his slow but sure reclining,
Star by star his world resigning."

On the other hand, it gives a certain evidence of the power of the naked soul, as it were, which the world would fare badly without. It is an embodiment of the feeling which the most capable of modern workers will own to now and again, "a recurring need," it has been said "to get away from society, and to dispense with the swimming belts of popular habits and duties, public opinion and the aid of books and friends." The conviction that institutions were made for man, and not man for institutions, may be suggested by a sense of failure, and yet may amount to an inspiration.

And at this point of our treatment of Decadence, when it is obviously metamorphosing itself under our hands into the idea of Renaissance, we can hardly avoid some reference to the coming of Christianity. It seems plain that the great transformation which began with the Christian era cannot be wholly dissociated from the movement which we have been reviewing. If for example we were to take into account the relation of Christian theology to the Pagan philosophical schools, or the growth of Christian painting and architecture out of the tradition of the Greco-Roman world, matters which are really too vast in their scope for our consideration to-day, we should unquestionably conclude to a unity of movement, and not merely to a contemporaneousness of events, in the growth of the modern consciousness out of the decay of the ancient world. I may mention simply the date (530 A.D.) of the church of St. Sophia in Constantinople, which has been described as "the most perfect work of art that has yet been known in organic beauty of design and splendour of ornament," because this date shows us clearly, in contrast, I think, with popular opinion, how close upon and within the decay of Paganism there arose the true first prime of Christian architecture. In fact, it was the Emperor Justinian,

the builder of St. Sophia, who almost in the same year closed for ever the philosophical schools of Athens.

Let us return to another side of the decadence. It is appropriate to our meeting to-day to consider the intellectual origin of University education in Europe. It dates, I imagine, from the death of Plato, who bequeathed to his disciples at Athens at once a doctrine and an endowment. The Platonic Philosophy, of course, was a splendid work of the close of the classical period ; but the organisation of University teaching at Athens and elsewhere, and the formation of a curriculum analogous to Plato's ideal draft of a higher education, are characteristic of the age of decadence ; and the curriculum thus originated, in some respects a parody of that really suggested by Plato, descended as the Trivium and Quadrivium through the middle ages, and was not without an influence on the working of the modern Universities. It is thus no mere paradox to say that we owe the idea of University Education to the Greco-Roman decadence. Greece, in fact, became just in that decadence the paid instructor of the Roman world in Art and Letters. It is characteristic for the part played by the decadence that the ideal theory of the higher education sprang from the greatest genius of the classical philosophy, while the dwarfing and disfigurement of it which seemed involved for the time in its application to life, were the work of generations in which the original doctrine was no longer understood. The title which still survives for the old "Greats" school at Oxford, the school of *Literae Humaniores*, breathes the better spirit of the Greco-Roman decadence, which came to Oxford, I should suppose, by way of the Italian Renaissance. We all remember as an example of this spirit—of this faith in a world the key of which one has lost, Colonel Newcome's favourite quotation from Ovid, "*Ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes emollunt mores nec sinuisse feros*" ! The Humanities, I think, is the name they give to Greek and Latin in Scotland. We are saying nothing depreciatory of this great tradition when we point out that it was naturally first formulated in an age which felt that something precious had passed away, and that its memory must be maintained by special institutions, if it was to be maintained at all.

An interesting example of this tendency on a smaller scale is the foundation of the Professorship of Poetry in the University of Oxford. Judging from the account given by Mr. Courthope, the late Professor, in his inaugural lecture recently published, there can be little doubt that John Birkhead, the seventeenth century founder of the chair, belonged in spirit to the decadence. Their object was, says Mr. Courthorpe of him and his co-workers in poetry, to give distinction to any theme, however trivial, by adorning it with a multitude of far-fetched metaphors, similes and allusions. They published together a small volume of poems, Birkhead's contribution to which was "not absolutely the worst;" but he was the champion of a losing cause, alike in politics and in poetry. He came of course after the exhaustion of the Elizabethan fount of song, and he must have held, we may suppose, that study and learning were the essentials of poetic art, and yet we owe to the chair which he founded some of the best literary criticism in the English language, and to one of its occupants we owe the *Golden Treasury*.

We may insist a little upon this example, in order to come nearer to something like the essence of our subject. Shakespeare, it was observed the other day by the present Professor of Poetry, was not a conscientious artist. I have little doubt that John Birkhead was. Now it would not be safe to say, with the example of Sophocles or Raphael before our eyes, that the artist of a great creative period is never conscientious; but we might say, perhaps without much danger of going wrong, that a strained and scrupulous conscientiousness is likely to be characteristic of a decadent art and culture. Literary criticism and æsthetic theory almost necessarily prosper in a decadence. How important the treatise on the Sublime, of the Augustan Age or later, has been for modern thought! Mr. Courthope has said that a classical period is universal in its character, and a decadent period is individual. Individuality, perhaps, is too good a name for the thing which is meant; and it might be better to say that a classical period has a solidarity of faith and spirit, while a decadence is tentative and particu-

larist. But these general names will not help us much; the bearing of all such observations lies in the application of them. It is, however, so easy to speak in deep-seeming metaphors of the death-birth of a world, or life springing out of corruption, that it does seem worth while to try to express, straightforwardly, what it is that we take to be the paradox of a decadence and its connection with a renaissance.

First then, it seems essential that the decadence should be relative to a prime. It implies that there has been a very great achievement, whether in art, science, or government, of such a kind as causes and implies a high tension of life on the part of a whole community, or some large section of it. It was really with reference to the decay of the Roman Empire that the term decadence* was first used in English.

Secondly, it is implied that owing to one or more of very various causes, whether external or internal, this great achievement is no longer sustained, but yet its tradition and its fragments remain, and in some way influence the world.

Then thirdly, it is implied that this tradition and these fragments, although held in reverence, cease to be understood as the thing itself was understood when it existed in all its grandeur.

But fourthly, this ceasing to be understood is a two-sided process. You may illustrate it by Max Müller's idea that imaginative mythology arises through people forgetting the true meaning of words. Well, in a certain sense this is a true account of what happens. People do forget the old meaning of words as they are applied, necessarily, in new experiences and to meet new difficulties, just as I suppose people used catchwords out of the Bible in very new senses in the time of the English Commonwealth. Just so in a decadence words and ideas and forms of art are all dragged off by different minds according to their needs and fancies, the unity of thought and feeling having broken up; and are applied and elaborated narrowly, practically, intensely, becoming mottoes and creeds and scholastic theories, but for that

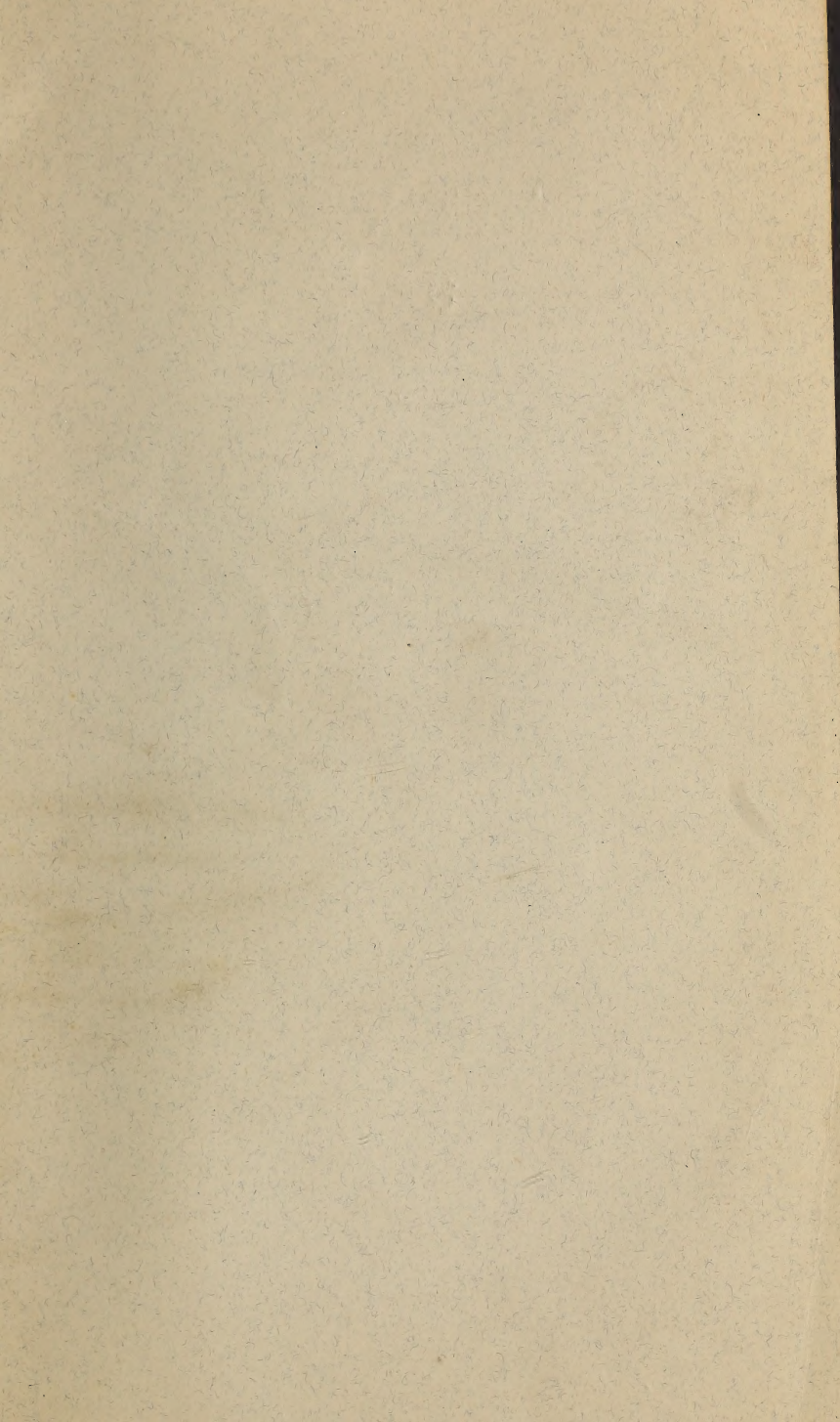
* It is a perfectly good English word, with a history on English soil of more than two hundred years.—See "MURRAY'S DICTIONARY," *sub voce*.

very reason being worked out, sometimes corruptly, or with frigidity, sometimes again with a certain many-coloured novelty and audacity, the audacity of the specialist. You can see the old language, the old moral notions, and the old beauty echoing on and on, but acquiring a new and original note in their very echoes, echoes from new kinds of substances, one might say, as for example when the Greek beauty was touched with Asiatic richness. The very formation of the Romance languages, I suppose, indicates a process of that kind. French must be in a sense the very debris of Latin, but has acquired of course in its formation new and wonderful powers. This is to me the central interest of a decadence ; to see the mind of man forging ahead, as it were, by the inherent logic of things, in the teeth of circumstances and without the aid of transcendent genius.

This then perhaps is the characteristic note of a decadence ; the meaning of a great past being forgotten, but its tradition respected, and worked out by fragmentary applications which end in new forms, and which produce material for another age of supreme insight and creation. In matters of art and literature this might apply to some phenomena of our own day. I do not think that the whole of social life rises and falls together so immediately to-day as in the little Greek cities or even in the Greco-Roman time. Society is stronger, and the connection of the sides of life, though absolutely real, is subtler and slower in its operation. So in finding decadent features within our life to-day, I am not agreeing with Nordau that we are a decadent society. But the anarchy or particularism of decadence is very observable in our art and letters, every man fighting for his own hand, by the help of some fragment of tradition which he misunderstands in his own way. The absorption of our younger painters in the pure study of light, which our better critics insist upon, is, I believe, a case strikingly in point. Undoubtedly those are right who contend that such a realism, if it is a realism, or impressionism, if it is an impressionism, involves in itself no narrowing of the imagination, but places a fresh instrument in its hands and opens to it new worlds to conquer. The same thing is

ultimately true, I have no doubt, even of that elaborate and conscientious study of the remoter meanings and effects and associations of language—of the actual word—to which has been given the name of symbolism or of decadent style. It is, I repeat, in itself the forging of a new instrument in the hand of imagination. But whether the workmen in these materials are more than the journeymen of a decadence ; whether they see and understand the place of their workmanship, their mosaic, so to speak, in the whole fabric of a great imaginative construction, is more than I would venture to determine. Here, however, in this sense of unity and of the whole, of the relation between form and substance, is the “*articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiæ*,” the criterion of life and of decadence in the realm of art and literature.

We have attributed many beautiful things to periods of decadence, and it may be thought that we have blurred the distinction which the term is intended to convey. Even Homer, it has been suggested, belongs to the close of a civilisation which the telescope of archaeology sees stretching behind him, and is not without his touches that indicate a sense of bygone greatness. It would certainly seem that the Homeric warrior was not possessed by that love of battle for its own sake, which we ascribe to our own Northern ancestors in the youth of the modern world. There is, however, one form of art—the true poetical drama—which can hardly be produced except in a classical period ; a period when the creative excitement of some single impulse is shared by at least a large section of the public, making them able and willing to sympathise in the constructive effort of the poet and to live up to the tension of his mind. The Poetical Drama has flourished for very few centuries indeed in the history of the world, and its cessation, when its conditions have ceased to exist, has generally been sharp and definite. Whether it is ever to appear again I will not prophecy ; but its appearance would be the surest, I do not say the sole possible sign, that the world was once more fusing into a splendid unity the anarchic and ambiguous beauties of a decadence.



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